

House Armed Services Committee

DEMOCRATS

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Ike Skelton, Ranking Member

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McHugh/Hunter Provision Limits Flexibility of Commanders during War

Washington D.C.— The McHugh/Hunter provision in the Defense Authorization Bill codifies most of the language used in a 1994 DOD policy memo that limits the service of women in the military. However, there are two significant changes that have the potential to reduce the future role of women in the military.

McHugh/Hunter includes language saying that any positions currently closed to women shall remain closed. Under current law when the Department wants to expand or modify the role of women, it only has to notify Congress. The policy change is then implemented unless Congress takes action to reject it.

Under the new provision, if one of the military services decides that it needs to expand or modify the role of women, it must request a statutory change from Congress.

“This McHugh/Hunter provision will limit the roles women may serve under the guise of increased congressional oversight,” said **Ranking Member Ike Skelton (MO)**. “By limiting women to only those jobs they perform today, it will be more difficult for commanders to adapt their forces to the changing needs of current operations around the world.”

“This language tells our commanders that Congress does not trust them to make their own decisions about battlefield needs,” **Skelton** continued.

“While this provision doesn’t directly remove women from combat support roles, the directive report language urges commanders to take particular care to minimally expose female members to direct combat. We have no way of knowing how this will be implemented by commanders on the ground in Iraq or Afghanistan,” said **Personnel Subcommittee Ranking Member Vic Snyder (AR)**. “There is no way to know what the secondary result of this provision will be.”

McHugh/Hunter also omits a key phrase from current policy that says the military “will use this guidance to expand opportunities for women.”

“The underlying spirit of the current policy is that women are to be afforded increasing opportunities within the military. This new provision projects that women must be protected from the battlefield. By not including that single statement of policy, this provision takes a backdoor approach to limiting the ability of women to serve their country,” commented **Rep. Susan Davis (CA)**.

“This is about national security. Our military is falling short of its recruiting and retention goals. If we limit the ability of women for successful career advancement, it will be difficult to enlist the number of new recruits we need,” added **Davis**.